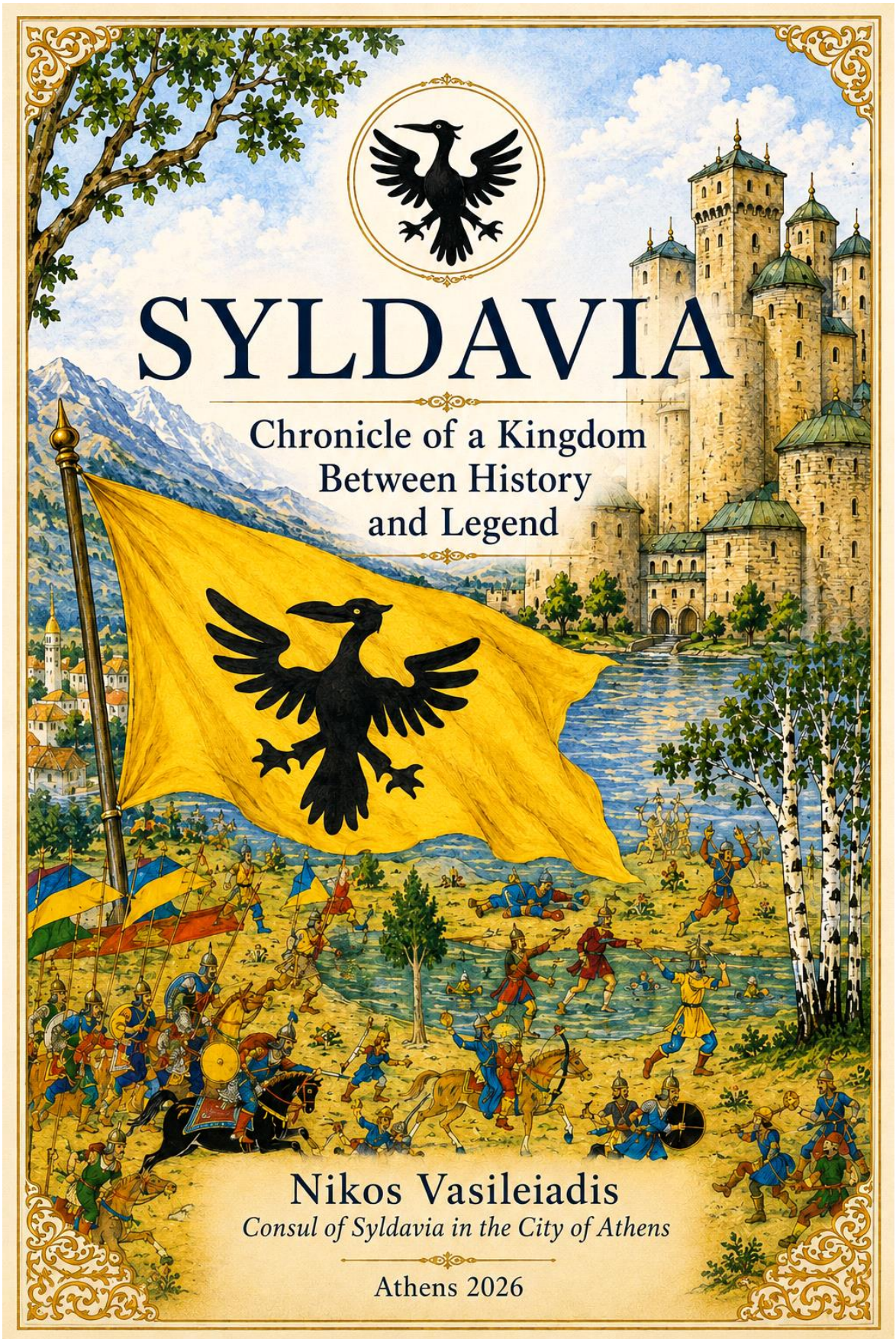
SYLDAVIA
Chronicle of a Kingdom
Between History
and Legend
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Consul of Syldavia in the City of Athens
Athens 2026

SYLDAVIA

Chronicle of a Kingdom Between History and Legend

Dedication

To the friends of Tintin,

to the collectors and scholars of Hergé’s work,

and to the Consuls of Syldavia around the world.

For as long as there are people who remember, explore, and tell its stories,

Syldavia will never cease to exist.

Author's Note

Syldavia never existed.

We shall find it on no political map, in no school textbook and in no official history of the nations of Europe. Yet for many generations of admirers of Tintin's adventures, it has seemed as real as any other country on our continent.

When Hergé created Syldavia for the purposes of *King Ottokar's Sceptre* in 1938, he did not merely invent a fictional kingdom. He created a symbol. A small European country confronted by the expansionist ambitions of a totalitarian neighbour, at a time when authoritarianism and nationalist fanaticism threatened the whole of Europe.

Behind Syldavia lie the memories and traditions of many real countries of the Balkans. The coasts of Dalmatia, the mountains of Montenegro, the medieval towns of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Byzantine churches, Ottoman bazaars, and the legends of Slavs, Illyrians and Greeks coexist within this imaginary world.

This book was born from the desire to follow that thread of imagination and discover where it leads. To treat Syldavia as though it had truly existed. To provide it with a past, cities, kings, wars, legends and memories. To create a history that is not true, yet might have been.

At the same time, through the story of Syldavia, an attempt is made to explore the history and culture of the Balkans; a region that for centuries served as a meeting place of peoples, religions and empires. A region that is often presented through the lens of its conflicts, while in reality possessing one of the richest cultural heritages in Europe.

Perhaps this is why Hergé's story continues to resonate. For behind *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, King Muskar and the Black Pelican, one may discern a deeper truth: that the freedom, independence and cultural identity of small nations are never guaranteed.

More than eighty years after the publication of the story, the questions raised by Hergé appear perhaps more relevant than ever. The threats may have changed form, yet the struggle between freedom and authoritarianism, between memory and oblivion, remains part of the European reality.

If, while reading the pages that follow, the reader feels even for a moment that Syldavia truly existed somewhere between the shores of the Adriatic and the mountains of the Zmyhlpathes, then this small literary journey will have achieved its purpose.

Nikos Vasileiadis
Athens, 2026

Preface

Few countries in Europe have been so small in territory and yet so vast in the memory of their people as Syldavia.

Nestled between the rugged peaks of the Zmyhlpathians and the tranquil shores of the Adriatic, this land stood for centuries as a meeting place of peoples, languages, and traditions. From the ancient Illyrian tribes and Roman colonies to medieval rulers, Venetian merchants, and the mountain warriors of the frontier, its history was shaped by the constant encounter of different worlds.

Its inhabitants were fond of saying that Syldavia was more a road than a destination. A place where East meets West, where the bells of churches ring alongside the calls from minarets, and where legends endure with the same strength as historical events.

Over the centuries that followed, kings rose and fell, empires crossed its borders, and wars transformed the face of the country. Yet the memory of its people remained unchanged, preserving the traditions, symbols, and narratives that formed the foundation of their identity.

The chronicle that follows seeks to recount this long journey. From the earliest peoples who inhabited the valleys of the Wladir to the adventures and upheavals of the twentieth century, it traces the path of a kingdom that found itself, time and again, at the crossroads of history.

Let us begin our journey.

"Every nation is born twice: once in history and once in legend."
Old Syldavian proverb

The Land of the Black Pelican: Between History and Legend

In a corner of Southeastern Europe, where the roads of the Balkans intersect with the memories of empires, lies Syldavia, the Kingdom of the Black Pelican. Although its existence remains absent from conventional geographical maps, its history unfolds with such coherence and richness that it appears as a parallel version of European reality itself.

The Ancient Roots of Syldavia

The earliest references to the peoples of the wider region come from ancient Greek writers. Herodotus mentions the Paeonians, while later sources refer to the Triballi and other Thracian tribes inhabiting the northern and eastern territories of what would later become Syldavia. The mountainous regions of the country appear to have been settled by related Illyrian and Thracian populations who only later emerge under more distinct names in historical sources, notably the Labeatae and the Dardanians.

There, the inhabitants are described as warlike, tall, and powerfully built, devoted to hunting, feasting, and warfare, in accordance with the image that Greek authors commonly attributed to the peoples of the northern lands. Their rulers dwelt in fortified citadels perched upon hilltops, protected by massive stone walls that later traditions would describe as Cyclopean in construction.

The people worshipped deities of the earth and the mountains, largely unknown to the Greeks, and believed that the souls of the dead continued to live in another world. The black feathers of the country's pelicans were especially prized and were exported throughout the Greek world.

"...Its inhabitants are numerous and divided among many nations; yet those who dwell in the high mountains possess, in my opinion, the most remarkable customs. Their rulers raise great burial mounds upon the hills and claim descent from ancient gods little known to the Greeks. On the mountain summits stand sacred places where the oracles of Dionysus are delivered, and crowds ascend bearing sacrifices and offerings. They also believe that the soul of man does not perish with death but passes into another life; for this reason they honour their dead with contests, festivals, and grand ceremonies."

During the fourth century BC, Syldavia entered the sphere of the Hellenistic conflicts. Tradition holds that Alexander the Great campaigned against the Illyrian and Thracian mountain tribes of the western Balkans, subduing rulers and peoples who inhabited the inaccessible mountains

between the Adriatic and Dardania during his Balkan campaign of 335 BC, prior to his expedition into Asia.
Alexander moved against them in order to secure Macedonia's northern frontiers. The principal source is Arrian's Anabasis of Alexander, Book I, although most of the surviving information derives from fragmentary references by later chroniclers whose historical reliability remains uncertain.
According to Syldavian and Dalmatian traditions, in 281 BC a contingent of the army of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, was defeated by the Labeatae and the Dardanians at a location that has never been conclusively identified. Some scholars associate the site with Hellenistic remains discovered in the region of Travunia (Byzantine Greek: Travounia or Tervounia; Latin: Travunia; Slavic: Travunija), a medieval historical region and principality of the western Balkans situated roughly where eastern Herzegovina, the area of Trebinje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of modern Montenegro are located today.
Roman penetration into the region began in the late second century BC, though the definitive conquest is conventionally dated to 87 BC, when the legions of Gaius Hilarius Pollio subdued the tribes of the Trebiesa Valley, named after the Trebišnjica River, one of the most important waterways of eastern Herzegovina and the district of Župa (Zoupa).
The campaign proved particularly harsh owing to the rugged terrain and the fierce resistance of the mountain tribes. Roman sources speak of widespread destruction of fortified settlements and the establishment of military outposts along the commercial routes of the Adriatic hinterland.
The local highland tribes were gradually incorporated into the Roman administration, and in the following year Bardylis, King of the Labeatae, formally acknowledged the sovereignty of Rome. Thus were created the provinces of Upper and Lower Syldavia, while colonies such as Clovinum and Istriodunum were founded by veterans of the Legion XXXXII Invictus.

During the Roman civil wars, Syldavia successively passed under the control of Julius Caesar, Brutus, Lepidus, and finally Octavian. The strategic position of the region between the Adriatic and the Balkan interior made it an important corridor for troop movements and supply lines.
Following Octavian's final victory, the Syldavian provinces were fully integrated into the Roman administrative system and entered a long period of relative stability and economic development. Clovinum, which had suffered extensive destruction during the conflicts of the preceding decades, was rebuilt in 39 BC according to Roman urban planning principles. Archaeological evidence attests to the construction of aqueducts, baths, temples, and public buildings, demonstrating both the strength of the Roman presence and the gradual Romanization of the local elites.

Populi Syldavari

The ethnological composition of the country is particularly complex. The Ardiaei, the Labeatae, and the Autariatae formed the oldest Illyrian substratum, to which Roman settlers and small Gothic groups were later added, among them the Tervingi. The fusion of these populations shaped the core of the Populi Syldavari. During the sixth and seventh centuries, Slavic tribes

settled in the region, while in the Middle Ages the country became culturally and politically linked with the Narentines, the Zachlumians, and the Travunians.

Language and Cultural Identity

The cultural identity of the Populi Syldavari was shaped not only by the coexistence of different peoples, but also by the gradual formation of a distinctive language. The Syldavian language (zyldavski jazik), as it evolved during the Middle Ages, belongs to the South Slavic linguistic sphere, while nevertheless preserving strong remnants of older Illyrian and Latin idioms. The long presence of the Roman Empire, commercial contacts with the Dalmatian cities of the Adriatic, Venetian influence, and later Ottoman rule left numerous loanwords in its vocabulary. During the Middle Ages, the Cyrillic and Latin scripts were used side by side. The former prevailed in the mountain provinces and in ecclesiastical texts, while the latter survived along the coast and in the commercial centres connected with Dalmatia and Venice. After the national revival of the nineteenth century, the Latin script was officially established, although the older tradition never disappeared completely.

Syldavian literature developed around the monasteries of Saint Vladimir and the courts of the first kings. Folk songs, epic poems about Muskar I, and legends surrounding the Black Pelican were preserved for centuries through oral tradition before being written down in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, becoming the foundation of modern Syldavian national consciousness.

The Birth of the Kingdom, the Age of the Almazout, and the Great Ordeal

According to tradition, the Kingdom of Syldavia was founded in 1127 by the ruler Radoslav I, who succeeded in uniting the scattered mountain principalities of the country and laying the foundations of the first Syldavian monarchy. The new dynasty, later known as the House of Almazout, rested upon an alliance between local nobles, the Slavic populations of the interior, and the mercantile cities of the Adriatic.

For more than two centuries, Syldavia enjoyed a period of relative stability. Clove developed into an administrative and religious centre, while commercial ties with Dalmatia and Venice brought prosperity and cultural influences. The monasteries of Saint Vladimir became centres of learning and manuscript production, and the Syldavian language and traditions gradually acquired the characteristics they would retain in the centuries to come.

This period became known in later chronicles as *The Age of the Almazout*. The kings of the dynasty were regarded as guardians of the kingdom’s unity and custodians of the distinctive identity of the *Populi Syldavari*.

Yet the country’s geographical position would prove both a blessing and a curse.

By the end of the fourteenth century, Syldavia found itself caught between two expansionist powers. To the west, the influence of Venice was steadily increasing as the Republic sought

control of the commercial routes of the Adriatic. To the east, the Ottoman Empire was advancing. The fall of Bulgaria and the subjugation of Borduria brought the Ottomans to the very borders of the kingdom.

The kings of Syldavia attempted to preserve their independence through alliances, diplomatic manoeuvres, and military resistance. The inhabitants of the Zmyhlpathes transformed their mountains into natural fortresses, but the pressure of events proved relentless.

As the fifteenth century advanced, the cities of the interior fell one after another. Trade routes were disrupted, and royal authority steadily weakened. The end came in 1494.

King Grigor II, the last free ruler of medieval Syldavia, sent his family and the sacred relics of the dynasty into safety before leading a final campaign of resistance. He was defeated, captured, and executed. The location of his grave was never discovered.

In popular memory, however, Grigor II became a symbol of the lost homeland and the hope of eventual return.

Syldavia was incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system and placed under the Pashalik of Borduria, governed by Kara Ahmed Pasha. Despite the loss of independence, the inaccessible mountain regions retained a considerable degree of autonomy. Local communities, monasteries, and the mountain nobility continued to preserve the traditions, language, and memory of the old kingdom.

Hope of liberation was rekindled in the early sixteenth century through Prince Alexander I, a descendant of the House of Almazout. Raised in exile and having served with the Knights of Malta, he acquired military experience and cultivated powerful international allies.

In 1516 he landed upon the Adriatic coast at the head of a small force composed of Syldavian exiles, Venetian volunteers, and mercenaries from Austria.

The recapture of Douma and the port of Kataro sparked a widespread uprising. For the first time since the conquest, a large part of the country found itself beyond Ottoman control.

Despite his successes, Alexander was unable to restore the kingdom’s full independence. Syldavia remained under the close protection of Venice. Nevertheless, it had returned to the political map of the region, and the historical continuity of the kingdom had been preserved.

The seventeenth century was a period of reconstruction. The gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire created new opportunities for the country. Its rulers sought to strengthen their autonomy, improve the efficiency of government, and revive the economy.

During the seventeenth century, several notable rulers emerged who attempted to reinforce the country's self-government. The administration was reorganized, trade with the cities of the Adriatic flourished once more, and Clove experienced a new era of economic and cultural prosperity. Commercial relations with the Adriatic cities expanded, bringing renewed wealth and influence.

When the eighteenth century dawned over the mountains of the Zmyhlpathes, Syldavia was no longer a subordinate principality struggling merely to survive. It had become a state possessing

a strong historical consciousness, a distinct cultural identity, and the conviction that sooner or later it would reclaim its full independence.

The foundations had been laid.

And upon those foundations would later arise Muskar I, the Battle of Zileheroum, and the great national revival that would ultimately lead to the birth of modern Syldavia.

The Battle of Zileheroum and the Black Pelican

After centuries of foreign domination and successive uprisings, Muskar I emerged as the leader of the national struggle in the early nineteenth century. At the head of an army composed of Travunians, Zachlumians, and other Slavic peoples of the interior, aided by volunteers from the Dalmatian coast and mercenaries from Carinthia, he succeeded in crushing the last Ottoman garrisons at the Battle of Zileheroum.

According to national legend, on the previous night he beheld a vision of a black pelican carrying in its beak a scroll bearing the inscription “Hoc signo vinces, niger onocrotalus.” This vision was adopted as the symbol of the national rebirth and later led to the creation of the Order of the Black Pelican.

Following his victory and the liberation of the capital, Muskar I was proclaimed king in 1827, marking the end of Ottoman rule and the restoration of the independent Kingdom of Syldavia.

The celebrated Battle of Zileheroum is recounted in the official chronicles of the Kingdom of Syldavia by the national author of Syldavia, Miroslav Muscario, in his novel The Black Pelican (1891 edition):

“At dawn on the twenty-third day of the Harvest Month in the year 1827, the plain of Zileheroum lay shrouded in a pale mist that smelled of damp earth and blood before a single drop had yet been spilled. The men stood silently behind their banners, gazing at the dark ranks of the army of the last Turkish Khan, stretched before them like a black river.

Muskar, son of warriors and still unaware of the destiny awaiting him, held his horse motionless atop a low hill. His gaze was fixed not upon the enemy but upon the heavens. The night before, he had seen a vision.

Beneath a sky devoid of stars, a gigantic black pelican descended from the clouds. Its wings covered the earth like a nocturnal storm, and in its beak it carried a golden scroll. When the creature came to a halt before him, its eyes blazed like burning coals and the scroll unfurled of its own accord. Upon the parchment were words Muskar had never seen before, and yet he understood them instantly: Hoc signo vinces, nigrum onocrotalus. ‘By this sign you shall conquer, O Black Pelican.’

He awoke drenched in sweat, yet his heart was filled with a strange certainty. Now, as the first rays of the sun tore through the mist, he ordered a new banner to be raised above the army. Upon the black cloth had been hastily embroidered during the night the image of the pelican from his vision. A murmur ran through the ranks of the warriors.

The Venetian mercenaries struck their spears against their shields. The Carinthian swordsmen made the sign of the Cross. And the men of Travunia and Zachlumia, seeing the strange emblem fluttering above their heads, felt that the gods of earth and sky marched beside them.
Then the trumpets sounded. The battle broke forth like a storm.
The horses charged first, hurling earth and stones into the air. Arrows darkened the sky. In the centre of the plain the two armies collided with such force that it seemed as though the world itself were splitting apart.
Muskar fought in the front ranks. His sword flashed among shields and helmets. Around him men fell; some cried out in pain, others in fury. The field of Zileheroum became strewn with shattered spears, dead horses, and banners soaked in mud.
For hours victory changed hands. The Khan's army pressed forward relentlessly. Its archers mowed down the allied lines, and its mounted warriors pierced the gaps like wolves rushing through a flock. Then Muskar saw the Banner of the Pelican in danger of falling.
The standard-bearer had been struck in the throat by an arrow and was collapsing to the ground.
Without hesitation, the ruler spurred toward the spot. He seized the staff with his own hands and raised it high above his head. The wind billowed the black cloth.
For a moment, everyone saw it.
His own men believed that the pelican spread its wings above the battlefield. Their enemies later swore that a dark bird had truly flown across the field. No one ever learned the truth.
What is certain is that at that very moment the lines of the Ottoman Pasha buckled.
The Venetians shattered his right flank. The Carinthian mercenaries encircled his infantry. And Muskar's warriors charged forward with cries that echoed all the way to the forests upon the hills.
Shortly before sunset, the last Pasha of Zileheroum fell from his horse into a pool of blood and mud. With his death, the old age came to an end.
Muskar stood among the dead and looked upon the field of victory. Around him the men knelt, exhausted and bloodied. Above their heads the black banner still fluttered in the wind.
Thus, say the chronicles, the kingdom was born.And thus was born the legend of the Black Pelican.
Later, in honour of the vision that had guided him to victory at Zileheroum, Muskar founded the Order of the Black Pelican, a brotherhood of warriors and nobles who swore loyalty to the Crown and to the symbol of the sacred bird.
Centuries later, the bards still sang that on that day, above slaughter and glory alike, a black pelican flew across the skies of Zileheroum carrying in its beak the destiny of an entire nation."

Clove, Capital of the Kingdom

In the centuries that followed, the capital city of Clove developed into one of the most remarkable examples of historical continuity. Ancient yet exceptionally well preserved, the city is built of pale yellow limestone and distinguished by its grand Venetian-style palaces and its abundance of Roman ruins.
Dominating the heart of the city is the Basilica of Saint Vladimir, the patron saint of Clove, a monument of considerable archaeological importance, believed to have been constructed by

engineers from Constantinople. According to Syldavian tradition, Saint Vladimir passed through the Wladir Valley in the early eleventh century during the wars between the rulers of Dioclea and the Bulgarian Empire. The inhabitants of Clove welcomed him and offered him refuge on a fortified hill overlooking the city.

When the ruler was later recognized as a martyr and saint, the people came to believe that the city's salvation from an enemy raid had been achieved through his intercession. On the site where, according to tradition, the saint had prayed, a small chapel was first erected. In time, this sanctuary evolved into the Basilica of Saint Vladimir. Ever since, the saint has been regarded as the protector of both Clove and the Syldavian monarchy.

Decorated in the Byzantine style with mosaics and sacred icons, the basilica is crowned by an imposing dome, while a significant portion of the city's water supply is still provided by a functioning Roman aqueduct.

The Old Town, known as Clovinum, stretches along the ridgeline and is dominated by the medieval castle, built in a severe Italian style with towers, battlements, and fortified gates. Facing the castle across the central square stands the Palace of the Rulers, an eighteenth-century edifice completed in 1742 following extensive demolitions of medieval structures. After the restoration of the kingdom in 1827, it was transformed into the royal residence.

To the west of the city, within the royal gardens, survive the ruins of Roman Clovinum, which had itself developed upon an earlier oppidum of the Labeatae, one of the most important Illyrian tribes of the region. Two columned temples, the remains of a grand urban villa, statues, and a square early Christian structure adorned with intricate mosaics form the core of this archaeological complex.

Here the royal family traditionally attended musical and theatrical performances in a reconstructed Roman theatre. The aqueduct, one of the most significant engineering achievements of antiquity in Syldavia, continues to carry water from the springs located north of the Fortress of Saint Vladimir.

The life of the city extends well beyond its walls. On the northern bank of the River Wladir rises the Extra-Muros, the Lower Town, distinguished by Venetian-style palaces and bustling commercial quarters, while on the western side stands the Muslim district with its elegant minarets.

Between these two areas lies the famous Grand Bazaar of the Three Gates, a covered marketplace founded during the Ottoman period that evolved into the foremost commercial centre of Syldavia. Here merchants from the Adriatic, Dalmatia, Borduria, and the Balkan interior gather to exchange textiles, spices, wine, timber, and precious metals. Along the slopes beneath the ancient walls stand old mansions, now inhabited by craftsmen and labourers.

To the east of the city extends Sankt Budvar, which evolved from a seventeenth-century fishing village into a refined suburb distinguished by its opera house and the residences of noble families. From the 1760s onward, it became an important centre of commerce and administration, housing the residences of local magnates, foreign consulates, and commercial missions representing the cities of the Adriatic.

Following the restoration of the kingdom in 1827, the ministries of government and the diplomatic missions of the European powers were established there.

On the southern bank of the Wladir stretches New Clove, a district that developed during the late Ottoman period and came to encompass the city's markets, workshops, and barracks. At its

heart stood the New Market, founded in 1670 through the initiative of local notables and merchants, marking the rise of a prosperous urban middle class.
Thanks to its strategic position on the trade routes linking the Adriatic with the Balkan interior, the district experienced rapid growth and, by the eighteenth century, had become the foremost economic centre of the country. After the restoration of the kingdom in 1827, the city expanded systematically southward, absorbing older settlements and gradually acquiring the modern urban character that it retains to this day.

Travellers, Diplomats, and Romantics

During the nineteenth century, Syldavia began to attract European travellers, diplomats, and scholars who were captivated by its medieval past, its mountainous landscapes, and its distinctive cultural character. Among them was Valentina Castafiore, the daughter of an Italian diplomat who had spent many years serving at the courts of the Adriatic and a distant relative of the future celebrated soprano, Bianca Castafiore.
Valentina visited Syldavia in 1878 on the occasion of the coronation festivities of King Muskar II, an event that drew delegations and observers from numerous European countries.
In her diary, Valentina Castafiore records that her family and personal attendants were to cross Europe by rail as far as Venice and from there embark on a steamship bound for Dbrnuk, Syldavia's principal Adriatic port. From Dbrnuk they would continue by train to the capital, Clove, where they intended to attend the celebrations marking the coronation of King Muskar II.
In the earliest entries of her journal, she expresses particular enthusiasm for the old city of Clove and her intention to devote time to her favourite artistic pursuit, watercolour painting, capturing the ruins of the medieval castle and the Venetian palaces overlooking the River Wladir.
Through her travel diaries emerges the portrait of a vibrant and cosmopolitan society, where the ancient aristocracy of Syldavia coexisted with diplomats, merchants, and visitors from every corner of Europe. Valentina describes splendid balls held in the palaces and mansions of Clove, formal banquets, festive parades, and receptions attended by the elite of Syldavian society, whose members maintained close family and diplomatic ties with the great courts of the continent.
In the pages of her journal she also expresses a desire to become acquainted with the young officers of the famed Syldavian Hussars and to participate in the grand balls of the capital, where, as she notes with youthful enthusiasm, "a young lady may spend an entire night dancing among the noblest and most charming people in the kingdom."
Her testimony complements the picture of the region's growing international importance during the Napoleonic era. According to later Syldavian and Dalmatian sources, Admiral Nelson and Emma, Lady Hamilton, spent a short period in 1799 at the southern port of Kataro as part of British naval operations in the Adriatic, Naples, and the Ionian Islands during the Napoleonic Wars.

Tradition holds that part of the British fleet was resupplied and underwent limited repairs in the great lagoon of the region, which had already been used since the eighteenth century as a secure anchorage for merchant and naval vessels crossing the Adriatic.
In a later copy of a letter addressed to the British ambassador in Naples, Nelson is said to have described the Bay of Kataro as “a natural harbour of exceptional security, surrounded by mountains capable of sheltering an entire fleet from every storm of the Adriatic.” Although this reference does not appear in the known British editions of his correspondence, it remains part of local historical tradition.
In 1819, Lord Byron—one of the foremost poets of English Romanticism alongside Shelley and Keats, a hero of the Greek War of Independence, and an international symbol of liberalism and philhellenism—visited Clove during his travels through Italy and the Adriatic region in the company of the Italian countess, writer, and his last great love, Teresa Guiccioli.
Their passionate relationship lasted approximately from 1819 to 1823. During his stay in Syldavia, Byron worked on portions of Don Juan and, enchanted by the natural beauty of the country, penned a phrase that would later become famous in Syldavian tradition, describing its coastline as “the most beautiful meeting of land and sea.”
Teresa Guiccioli, in memoirs attributed to members of her family circle, described Clove as “a city of golden stone and shadowed gardens, suspended between the mountains and the sea.” She appears to have been particularly impressed by the city’s ancient walls, the Byzantine domes of the Basilica of Saint Vladimir, and the colourful markets where merchants from Venice, Dalmatia, and the Balkan interior mingled.
In a later account she wrote that “the evenings in Clove possess a serenity I found neither in Venice nor in Ravenna; the lights of the houses are reflected upon the River Wladir, while the bells of the churches mingle with the voices of boatmen and the calls of the muezzins.”
Many historians regard this description as one of the earliest literary portrayals of the Syldavian capital.

Ottokar’s Sceptre and the Crisis of 1938

The conflicts with Borduria during the nineteenth century profoundly affected the political balance of the region. Europe itself was changing rapidly.
The most serious political crisis of interwar Syldavia erupted in 1938, when a plot to overthrow the monarchy, supported by neighbouring Borduria, was uncovered. According to later state archives, the conspiracy was organized by pro-Bordurian circles within the military and the aristocracy, who sought to provoke a constitutional crisis and facilitate the annexation of the country.
At the heart of the scheme was the theft of Ottokar’s Sceptre, the most sacred symbol of the Syldavian monarchy. According to ancient custom, the king was required to carry the sceptre during the annual Feast of Saint Vladimir; its loss would have been sufficient to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the throne of Muskar XII.
According to Syldavian tradition, Ottokar’s Sceptre is the oldest and holiest relic of the kingdom. The royal chronicles state that it originally belonged to Ottokar the Great, the legendary ruler of the earliest Syldavian tribes. During the unification of the country in the twelfth century, it was entrusted to Radoslav I, founder of the medieval kingdom, and from that time onward it was

used at every coronation as a symbol of the continuity of the state and the legitimacy of the dynasty.
Following the Ottoman conquest of the fifteenth century, the sceptre was smuggled to safety by monks of the Monastery of Saint Vladimir and hidden in the mountainous provinces of the Zmyhlpathes. Tradition maintains that it remained there for nearly four centuries, guarded by a secret brotherhood loyal to the Syldavian monarchy.
When Muskar I led the national uprising of 1827, the sceptre was displayed publicly for the first time in generations. During his coronation in Clove, it was held above the head of the new king as a sign that the ancient monarchy had been reborn and that the legitimacy of the state had been restored.
Since that time, every monarch of Syldavia has been required to bear Ottokar’s Sceptre during the ceremony of accession. According to custom, its loss renders any claim to the throne invalid, a fact that explains the immense political significance it retains to this day.
A decisive role in thwarting the conspiracy was played by the young Belgian journalist Tintin, who was then in Syldavia as a correspondent for Le Petit Vingtième, a publication already renowned for its international reporting. By tracking the movements of the conspirators and investigating their contacts with Bordurian agents, he succeeded in exposing the network connected to the neighbouring country's intelligence services and alerted the authorities in time.
According to official reports of the period, Tintin took an active part in the operation to recover Ottokar’s Sceptre, which had been secretly transported toward the border with the intention of making it disappear before the royal ceremony.
Thanks to his timely intervention, the sceptre was recovered only hours before the annual Procession of Saint Vladimir and returned to the royal court. The leaders of the conspiracy were arrested or fled to Borduria, while King Muskar XII was able to appear in public carrying the sacred relic, thereby preserving the unquestioned legitimacy of the monarchy.
In recognition of his services to the kingdom, Tintin was awarded the Order of the Black Pelican, one of the highest distinctions of the realm and an exceptionally rare honour for a foreign citizen. He was also proclaimed an Honorary Friend of Syldavia.

War, Occupation, and Exile

The failure of the coup temporarily strengthened the prestige of the monarchy and was regarded as a triumph of Syldavian independence. Yet the events of 1938 revealed both the expansionist ambitions of Borduria and the vulnerable geopolitical position of the kingdom.
Today, historians regard the crisis as a prelude to the Bordurian invasion and occupation that followed during the Second World War. Despite the later fall of Clove and the exile of Muskar XII, the successful defence of the monarchy in 1938 remained a symbol of national unity and resistance, occupying a central place in the collective memory of the Syldavian people.
Following the failure of the Bordurian coup of 1938 and the preservation of the monarchy of King Muskar XII, Syldavia entered a period of apparent stability. By 1939, however, its geopolitical position had become increasingly fragile. The growing power of Borduria, its close association with the authoritarian regimes of Central Europe, and the militarization of the frontier created a permanent atmosphere of tension throughout the Balkans.
Syldavia, a small yet strategically important kingdom situated between the Adriatic and the mountainous interior of the Balkans, initially sought to pursue a policy of neutrality.

The government in Clove maintained commercial relations with both the Western powers and the neighbouring states of Eastern Europe, while King Muskar XII attempted to avoid any direct military involvement.

Despite these efforts, Bordurian influence had already penetrated deeply into the country by early 1940. Significant sections of the military and administration regarded political alignment with Borduria as inevitable. The secret police of Marshal Plekszy-Gladz established an extensive network of agents throughout Syldavia, particularly within the industrial districts and the universities of the capital.

The crisis reached its climax in April 1941, when Bordurian military forces crossed the eastern frontier under the pretext of “preserving stability in the region.” Resistance by the Syldavian army was brief but fierce, especially in the mountainous provinces of the Zmyhlpathes.

The Zmyhlpathes occupy the northern and eastern regions of the country. They are regarded as the historic homeland of the Populi Syldavari and are distinguished by their deep gorges, dense forests, and isolated monasteries. During the Ottoman period these regions retained a considerable degree of autonomy and served as refuges for rebels and fugitives.

In less than two weeks, Clove had fallen and the royal family fled the country through the Adriatic. Boarding a British destroyer at the port of Dbrnuk, they escaped first to Bari in southern Italy and later settled in London, where King Muskar XII established a government-in-exile with Allied support.

The period of occupation (1941–1944) proved decisive in shaping modern Syldavian identity. The Bordurian administration imposed censorship, carried out mass arrests, and pursued an extensive policy of cultural assimilation. The use of the Bordurian language became compulsory in public administration, while much of the press was placed under state control.

At the same time, however, a powerful resistance movement emerged. Guerrilla organizations were formed in the mountainous regions, composed of monarchist officers, peasants, and students. The monasteries of northern Syldavia also played a significant role, serving as centres for intelligence gathering and escape routes for political refugees.

During the final years of the war, Syldavia became an arena of competition between Western and Soviet influence. The advance of the Eastern Front into the Balkans led to the collapse of the Bordurian occupation administration in the autumn of 1944.

King Muskar XII returned to Clove in early 1945 under the protection of Allied forces, only weeks after the liberation of the country. His return was welcomed by large crowds as a symbol of national unity and the restoration of constitutional order.

During the first post-war years, the monarch played a largely symbolic role, overseeing the reconstruction of the country and its transition into the modern age.

Post-War and Modern Syldavia

The post-war period proved politically complex. Although the monarchy survived, the country found itself in an exceptionally difficult position between East and West. Borduria, now a socialist state governed under a one-party system, continued to seek political influence in Syldavia through espionage networks and pressure along the frontier.

During the 1950s, Syldavia pursued a policy of armed neutrality, similar to that adopted by several small European monarchies of the period. Despite economic recovery and the growth of

tourism along the Adriatic coast, society remained deeply scarred by the experience of occupation.
Today, historians generally agree that the years 1938–1945 decisively shaped modern Syldavian national consciousness. The preservation of Ottokar’s Sceptre during the war acquired a powerful symbolic significance and came to be regarded in the post-war era as a representation of the continuity of the state and the independence of the nation.

The Syldavian Space Programme and the First Manned Mission to the Moon (1947–1952)

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era of technological renewal for the Kingdom of Syldavia. The experience of occupation and the realization that the survival of a small state depended not only on military strength but also on scientific excellence led the Crown to finance a series of ambitious high-technology research programmes.

The most significant of these initiatives was the Royal Programme for Rocketry and Space Research, approved in 1947 and placed under the direction of the distinguished physicist Professor Tryphon Tournesol. Within a heavily guarded mountainous region of Syldavia, one of Europe's most advanced research centres was established, where hundreds of scientists, engineers and technicians worked under conditions of absolute secrecy.

The development of the X-FLR6 rocket represented the culmination of Syldavian technological expertise. Powered by a nuclear propulsion system and equipped with guidance technologies unprecedented for its time, the spacecraft was designed exclusively for manned space exploration. The programme's strategic importance soon made it the target of foreign intelligence services and organised espionage networks, which repeatedly attempted to obtain its technological secrets. These efforts were successfully thwarted by the Royal Security Service, confirming the effectiveness of Syldavia's counter-intelligence apparatus.

In the spring of 1952, the historic launch of the world's first manned mission to the Moon took place from the Royal Space Centre. The crew, consisting of Professor Tournesol, the journalist Tintin, Captain Haddock and the engineer Frank Wolff, successfully landed on the lunar surface, conducted scientific investigations on Earth's natural satellite, and returned safely to Syldavia. During the mission, engineer Frank Wolff lost his life after voluntarily leaving the spacecraft in an act of supreme self-sacrifice to increase the remaining crew's chances of a safe return. His sacrifice is today regarded as one of the noblest acts of courage in the history of Syldavian space exploration.

The success of the mission made Syldavia the first nation in history to accomplish both a manned spaceflight and a lunar landing, nearly a decade before the beginning of the better-known Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite this extraordinary achievement, the government deliberately restricted public knowledge of the programme,

believing that the disclosure of its technological capabilities would upset the fragile balance of the Cold War and expose the Kingdom to significant geopolitical risks.

Following the completion of the mission, a substantial part of the research infrastructure continued to operate exclusively for scientific purposes, while much of the programme's documentation remained classified for decades. The official position of the Kingdom has consistently maintained that the Syldavian Space Programme was never intended as a demonstration of military or political power, nor as the opening chapter of an international competition in space, but rather as a contribution to scientific progress and the peaceful exploration of outer space.

In modern Syldavia, the mission of 1952 is regarded as one of the greatest achievements in the nation's history, standing alongside the restoration of the monarchy and the defence of the Kingdom's independence. Each year, the Royal Museum of Science in Klow hosts a permanent exhibition commemorating the mission, reminding new generations that a small European kingdom proved that scientific vision and determination could transcend the limitations imposed by geography, size and geopolitical influence.

Only after the end of the Cold War and the partial declassification of the Royal Archives did it become possible to study the full extent of the Syldavian Space Programme. The release of technical files, photographic material, mission reports and government documents confirmed that the lunar expedition of 1952 was neither a legend nor a product of state propaganda, but one of the most remarkable scientific achievements of the twentieth century. For decades, however, it had remained largely unknown beyond Syldavia's borders, overshadowed by the geopolitical realities and strategic secrecy that defined the Cold War.

The Tournesol Crisis (1960)

In 1960, relations between Syldavia and Borduria entered one of the most tense and critical periods of the post-war era. The abduction of the distinguished scientist Professor Tryphon Tournesol by Bordurian intelligence agents triggered a major diplomatic crisis, highlighting the strategic importance that Syldavian scientific research had acquired during the Cold War. Although the successful rescue operation prevented the leakage of highly sensitive technological knowledge, it also exposed significant weaknesses in the Kingdom's system for protecting individuals engaged in research of national strategic importance.

As an immediate consequence of the crisis, the government undertook a comprehensive reorganization of the Royal Security Service, establishing specialized counter-intelligence units and strengthening security protocols for research institutions and strategic facilities throughout the Kingdom. At the same time, new measures were introduced to safeguard the scientific community and critical technological programmes, while cooperation between the military and civilian intelligence services was significantly enhanced. The "Tournesol Crisis," as it became known in Syldavian historiography, is widely regarded as a turning point in the evolution of the Kingdom's national security doctrine. It marked Syldavia's transition towards a modern and

integrated national security system capable of meeting the challenges posed by the geopolitical realities of the Cold War.

The Post-Cold War Era

The collapse of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century profoundly affected the political balance of the Balkans and, in particular, the relationship between Syldavia and Borduria.

The dissolution of Borduria's one-party system in 1991 initially raised hopes of reconciliation and normalization. The transition, however, proved unstable. Despite the formal abandonment of the old regime, significant parts of the state apparatus—particularly the security services, the military, and the bureaucracy—remained under the influence of figures whose careers and outlook had been shaped during the Cold War.

Syldavia confronted the new era in a different manner. The monarchy, having survived both the Bordurian occupation and the pressures of the Cold War, assumed an increasingly symbolic and unifying role. King Ottokar IV, known before his accession as Prince Muskar, championed a policy of European integration and institutional modernization.

During the 1990s, the country experienced significant economic growth. Its position on the Adriatic, political stability, and reputation as a "quiet European kingdom" attracted both investment and tourism. The Old City of Clove was designated a cultural heritage monument, while the seaside resorts of the southern coast developed into some of the most sought-after destinations in the Mediterranean.

Clove itself emerged as an important cultural and academic centre of Southeastern Europe. The city's interwar architecture, royal palaces, and historic cafés contributed to the formation of a distinctive cultural identity in which Central European, Balkan, and Mediterranean traditions coexist harmoniously.

Most contemporary historians agree that Syldavia represents a characteristic example of a small European state shaped under the constant pressure of larger powers, yet one that managed to survive through institutional adaptability, cultural cohesion, and a strong historical memory.

Thus, Syldavia emerges as a complete historical universe in which Roman heritage, Byzantine tradition, medieval power, and European modernity coexist, creating the impression of a place that, though born of imagination, possesses the depth and texture of a genuine history.

Epilogue

And here our journey comes to an end.

From the mist-covered peaks of the Zmyhlpathes and the ancient citadels of the first tribes to the palaces of Clove, Ottokar's Sceptre, and the adventures of the twentieth century, we have followed the traces of a people who lived between history and legend.

We have encountered kings and warriors, monks and travellers, poets, diplomats, and rebels. We have walked through the narrow streets of the old capital, listened to the bells of Saint Vladimir, wandered through the markets of the Lower Town, and stood before the ruins of

ancient Clovinum. We have witnessed empires rise and collapse, armies cross the mountains, and borders shift, while the memory of the country endured.
Perhaps Syldavia never appeared on the maps of geographers. Yet it existed in the pages of chronicles, in the songs of bards, in the recollections of travellers, and in the imagination of those who still seek places where history has not been severed from dream. And perhaps that is enough.
For every nation is founded not only upon stones, battles, and royal decrees, but also upon the stories it tells about itself. Syldavia, born from imagination yet clothed in the colours of European history, reminds us that legends often reveal truths that facts alone cannot express.
As this chronicle draws to a close, the towers of Clove once more fade into the distance, the waters of the Wladir continue their silent journey toward the Adriatic, and the Black Pelican still spreads its wings above the kingdom.
And somewhere, between history and legend, Syldavia continues to exist.
"Legends are the shadow that history leaves behind." Syldavian proverb.

Afterword
Hergé’s Syldavia: A Fictional Kingdom for a Europe in Crisis

When Georges Remi—the man who would become known throughout the world by the pen name Hergé—began drawing King Ottokar’s Sceptre in the summer of 1938, Europe stood at a historic crossroads. The continent had not yet descended into the Second World War, but the signs of the coming catastrophe were already visible to anyone willing to see them.
Nazi Germany had rearmed, Hitler had transformed the Weimar Republic into a totalitarian state, and Mussolini’s Italy had already demonstrated its expansionist ambitions in Africa and the Balkans. In March 1938, Austria had been absorbed into the Third Reich through the infamous Anschluss, while only a few months later Czechoslovakia would find itself in the crosshairs of German policy. For many Europeans, peace still seemed possible. For others, the crisis had already begun.
Hergé belonged to the latter group.
Although he was neither a political theorist nor a historian, he possessed a keen awareness of the events unfolding around him. With The Blue Lotus, he had already demonstrated that Tintin’s adventures could serve as a vehicle for commenting on international affairs. In King Ottokar’s Sceptre, he would go even further. For the first time, he would place his hero not in a real country but in a state entirely of his own creation.

This decision was far from accidental.

Had Hergé chosen to set his story in Austria, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, the work would immediately have become a direct political statement. By creating Syldavia, however, he gained a far greater degree of freedom. He could speak about the threat of totalitarianism without explicitly naming the principal actors of his time. He could tell the story of a small nation facing the loss of its independence without being constrained by the specific circumstances of any one country.

In this way, Syldavia became more than a fictional kingdom. It became a symbol of all the small European states living under the shadow of more powerful neighbours.

Hergé understood that reality exceptionally well. As a Belgian, he lived in a country that had experienced two German invasions within a single generation. The notion that the independence of a small state could be threatened by the ambitions of a great power was not an abstract theory. It was part of his nation's collective experience.

Thus, behind the fictional confrontation between Syldavia and Borduria lay a very real European anxiety. Borduria represented the totalitarian regimes that sought to expand beyond their borders. Syldavia represented the smaller nations struggling to preserve their political independence and cultural identity.

Even more intriguing is the fact that Hergé does not portray the danger as purely military in nature. The destruction of Syldavian independence begins with conspiracies, secret agents, political propaganda, and attempts to destabilize institutions. The invasion is not the first step; it is the last.

This observation now appears remarkably prescient. Hergé understood that totalitarian regimes did not rely solely upon military power. They depended equally upon undermining confidence in institutions, creating internal divisions, and exploiting political crises. King Ottokar’s Sceptre is not merely a story about an attempted conquest. It is a story about the fragility of political legitimacy itself.

The choice of the Balkans as the setting is equally significant.

For the Western European imagination of the early twentieth century, the Balkans represented an almost mythical landscape. It was the region where East and West met, where Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam intersected, and where the legacies of Rome, Byzantium, and the Ottoman Empire overlapped. Nineteenth-century travellers frequently described the area as a world of castles, monasteries, mountain tribes, kings, revolutionaries, and legends.

It was precisely this material that Hergé used to construct Syldavia.

His country corresponds to no single real state. Rather, it is a mosaic of Balkan influences. Elements drawn from Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Bosnia are combined into a coherent whole. The uniforms of the guards, the mountain roads, the castles, the religious traditions, and the local costumes all draw inspiration from across Southeastern Europe.

Perhaps this explains why Syldavia feels so authentic. It is not a copy of any real place. It is a distillation of many real places.

Looking back at Hergé’s work today, nearly a century after its creation, one is struck not only by his imagination but also by his foresight. King Ottokar’s Sceptre was written on the eve of the greatest catastrophe Europe would experience in the twentieth century. The war Hergé feared

eventually erupted in 1939. Many of the small nations that Syldavia symbolically sought to defend would indeed face invasion, occupation, and dictatorship.

For this reason, the story continues to resonate with readers today. It is not merely a classic Tintin adventure. It is also a reminder that the freedom of small nations, the independence of states, and the resilience of democratic institutions can never be taken for granted.

Syldavia may never have appeared on the maps of Europe. Yet it existed in the imagination of a creator who recognized the dangers of his age before many others did and who used the power of storytelling to illuminate them.

And perhaps that is why, so many years later, the little Kingdom of the Black Pelican still feels so real.

For behind the legends, the castles, and the royal sceptres lies a genuine story: the story of twentieth-century Europe and its enduring struggle against authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

Syldavia Beyond the Pages of Tintin

Few fictional countries have succeeded in escaping the boundaries of literature and acquiring a peculiar form of “real” existence within the collective imagination of their readers. Syldavia is perhaps the most remarkable example.

The extraordinary detail with which Hergé constructed the Kingdom of the Black Pelican—its language, flag, national emblem, royal ceremonies, history, and customs—gave many Tintin enthusiasts the impression that it was a country located just beyond the edges of reality’s maps.

Over the decades, Syldavia acquired a curious second life beyond the pages of the comics.

In various European countries—and beyond—symbolic “consulates” of Syldavia were established by Tintin clubs, collectors, and scholars of Hergé’s work. These consulates, of course, make no claim to any official statehood; rather, they serve as meeting places for people

who share a common affection for the world of Tintin and for the fictional country created by the Belgian artist.
Over time, these individual consulates became connected to one another, forming an informal international network of friends of Syldavia.
As they themselves often state: “The Consuls of Syldavia form an international network of Tintin enthusiasts whose mission is to represent Syldavia in their own countries and, beyond that, to promote the work of Hergé itself.”
The phenomenon is remarkable. Few literary or graphic works have succeeded in creating a fictional nation so convincing that readers felt compelled to represent it—if only symbolically—in the real world.
In a sense, Syldavia has followed the path of many real nations. It was born from a narrative, acquired symbols, created a community of people who felt connected to it, and ultimately secured a place within collective memory.
Perhaps this is Hergé’s greatest achievement.
He did not merely create a setting for a Tintin adventure. He created a country that continues to be inhabited by its readers. A country that, although it never appeared on the maps of Europe, still possesses citizens, ambassadors, and consuls throughout the world.
The present work was written in Athens under the auspices of the Consulate of Syldavia in the City of Athens, continuing in its own way this long and honourable tradition of the friends of the Kingdom of the Black Pelican.

About the Author

Nikos Vasileiadis was born in Athens in 1963. He studied Theology and Philosophy at the University of Athens and continued his postgraduate studies in Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh.
His professional career has spanned the fields of education, research, communications, and public policy. He has served in positions of responsibility at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games Organising Committee, the National Hellenic Research Foundation, the Hellenic Parliament, the European Parliament, and the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation.
Between 2012 and 2016, he served as Scientific Director of the United Nations programme 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with Project Everyone and UNICEF.

This initiative was honoured with the European Commission Award for Sustainable Development in 2019.

He is a member of the International Journalism Network and the European Journalism Centre and has been active for many years as a columnist and analyst of international affairs.

History, philosophy, political thought, and European cultural heritage constitute the enduring pillars of his intellectual interests. In the present volume, he seeks to illuminate one of the most fascinating landscapes of the European imagination: Hergé’s Syldavia.

Through the convergence of historical references, Balkan traditions, and literary invention, he explores the points at which myth encounters history and imagination becomes a vehicle of memory and culture.

“Syldavia never existed as a state. Yet it existed as an idea. And ideas, at times, leave a deeper imprint than history itself.”

Syldavia may never have appeared on the maps of Europe. Yet it lived in the imagination of a creator who recognized the dangers of his age and used the power of storytelling to reveal them.

Perhaps that is why, so many years later, the small Kingdom of the Black Pelican still feels so real. Behind its legends, castles and royal sceptres lies a deeper story: the story of twentieth-century Europe and its enduring struggle against authoritarianism and tyranny.

Between history and myth, Syldavia continues to live wherever readers keep its memory alive.

Nikos Vasileiadis

Consul of Syldavia in the City of Athens

Athens 2026